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Discursive psychological research on refugees

Chapter for *Discourse, peace and conflict: Discursive psychology perspectives*

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Abstract

As refugees are by definition people who have fled conflict, notions of peace and conflict are central to understanding arguments about their inclusion and exclusion. It will be argued that Discursive Psychology is well-suited for understanding these arguments. Discursive psychological research has illustrated how refugees, and their countries of origin, are constructed in ways that are linked with social and political responses to their situations. Therefore, the extent to which refugees' countries of origin are presented as dangerous is central to the legitimacy of their claims for asylum. Asylum seekers' and refugees' accounts of violence – both in their countries of origin and in the host societies – can be understood as constituting their own identities and justifying their status as 'real' refugees. However, opponents of asylum seeking in host societies argue against the presence of refugees through presenting them as a 'threat' to peaceful relations in that society.

Introduction

Peace and violence are at the core of understanding the topic of refugees. In this chapter we will explore discursive psychological research relating to refugees and asylum seekers, including the relationships between notions of place, identity, danger and safety, the construction of asylum seekers and refugees as 'threats', refugees' and asylum seekers' accounts of racism and violence, and the way in which harsh aspects of the asylum system are justified or criticised. We will end by examining the how discursive psychology can contribute to understanding present day issues in the form of the European refugee 'crisis'. Most of the examples we draw on are based in the UK, although some are from other countries, such as Australia and France. Data extracts are reproduced with their original transcription conventions, usually Jeffersonian notation (Jefferson, 2004). Our overall argument is that the topic of refugees has inherent relevance to peace psychology, and discursive psychology offers a way of understanding how refugees and asylum seekers are constructed through discourse, the consequences of which are a matter of life or death. As we will show, one ironic aspect of this subject is that arguments in favour of peace may be used in ways that prevent refugees from finding the peace they seek.

By definition, refugees are people who have fled danger in search of safety; and definitions are important, for only by demonstrating that they were forced to flee can refugees avail themselves of the legal protections afforded by asylum systems. More specifically, the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as someone who:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [sic] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

(UNHCR, 2010)

This means that only certain *people*, with certain *motivations*, who have moved between certain *places*, are able to gain such protection. 'Asylum seeker' is the term often applied to those who have submitted an application for asylum and have yet to have a determination of their case, whereas the term 'refugee' is often (although not exclusively) applied to those who have received formal recognition of their refugee status.

Contemporary Western discourse on refugees is characterised by ambivalence and hostility towards refugees, with moments of compassion (Kushner, 2006). In particular, public and political discourse on refugees tends to question the motivations of refugees, often defining them as economic migrants who are moving between countries on a voluntary basis, rather than because they have been forced to flee (Every & Augoustinos, 2008; Goodman & Speer, 2007). Such characterisations work to question the validity of their status as refugees, presenting them as not needing protection and as having questionable moral attributes, including allegedly entering potential host countries to take advantage of welfare provision, support services, healthcare and job opportunities, while abusing the asylum system and the generosity of the host society (Every & Augoustinos, 2008). These discourses work to limit the obligations of host societies towards refugees while maintaining the moral status of the people and nations that support such views. They do this through removing the people under discussion from the group of 'genuine refugees', instead portraying them in other ways, such as 'economic migrants', 'bogus asylum seekers', 'criminals' and 'terrorists' (Lynn & Lea, 2003; Malloch & Stanley, 2005; Zetter, 2007).

Notions of peace and violence feature in multiple ways in relation to discourse regarding refugees. In particular, refugees are defined by having fled certain places, and those places are defined by violence. In this way, the discursive constructions of people and place can be seen as mutually constitutive (Kirkwood, McKinlay, & McVittie, 2013a). Defining someone's country of origin as a place of violence, death, persecution and threat constitutes the individual as a person who has been forced to flee and is therefore in need of protection. Similarly, defining oneself as an individual who has been forced to flee renders the country of origin as a place of threat. In this regard the official definitions of refugees are extremely important: only certain types of violence and danger count when it comes to being treated as a refugee. For instance, economic hardship, no matter how great, tends not to be accepted as a legitimate reason for leaving a country, and indeed drawing on such accounts – what is presented as 'seeking a better life' – can be treated as rendering the individuals concerned as morally dubious (Kirkwood & McNeill, 2015; Long, 2013).

These discourses are important for understanding the structural violence relating to immigration systems. That is, discourses that delegitimise refugees and reinforce the need for tighter borders, greater security, increased use of detention and forced removal, and other punitive responses to asylum seekers, such as enforced destitution, work to create and reinforce structural violence against those seeking to move between nations. These effects include keeping people in, or returning people to, countries where their lives, rights and wellbeing are harmed, through war, harassment, torture, persecution and other forms of hardship. It also makes things more dangerous

for those attempting to move between countries, particularly when forced to use illicit and unsafe means, risking harm, abuse and death, such as is clear in the increasing number of deaths in the Mediterranean in recent years and people who die when stowing away on transport (Kassar & Dourgnon, 2014; Perkowski, 2016; Spijkerboer, 2007). Moreover, even those who cross borders to a supposed safe country may find their experiences are far from safe. They may experience abuse, destitution, detention and intrusive surveillance in the host countries (Spicer, 2008; Stewart & Mulvey, 2014), all of which demonstrates the extent to which immigration systems constitute forms of institutionalised violence and perpetuate social injustice.

Notions of violence and peace feature heavily in political discourse regarding refugees. Those who support the plight of refugees may make reference to the violence that is present in particular countries that produce refugees, highlighting the need of certain nations to recognise that violence, support refugees, and potentially consider other types of intervention – whether diplomatic or military – to address underlying causes (Every & Augoustinos, 2008; Kirkwood, 2017). In political and lay discourse, as well as the accounts from refugees themselves, references to racism are important for understanding how these notions are advanced, justified or challenged. For instance, politicians may present others as racist in order to justify greater support for refugees; equally, those arguing for less support for refugees, or indeed arguing that supposed refugees are in fact not refugees, will present themselves as not racist (Every & Augoustinos, 2007). This is also evident in lay discourse. People discussing refugees may debate the extent to which certain responses to refugees do or do not constitute racism (Goodman, 2010; Goodman & Burke, 2010). In their own accounts of racism, refugees carefully manage the implications of whether their experiences do or do not constitute racism, given that making accusations of racism is generally treated as ‘taboo’, and may be particularly sensitive for those reliant on protection in the host society (Kirkwood, McKinlay, & McVittie, 2013b). Accounts of violence and racism therefore function to justify particular responses to refugees as well as supporting or challenging certain forms of social relations.

Constructions of place, identity, safety and danger

Given that refugees are defined as having crossed borders fleeing persecution, the notion of place is central to their identities and therefore their recognition as refugees (and the rights that involves). In this regard, the notion of ‘place-identity’ is helpful for understanding this topic. Place-identity was developed as a concept by Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983, p. 59) and defined as a ‘sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of, broadly conceived, cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives’. Their definition treated place identity as a cognitive and affective concept. Dixon and Durrheim (2000) reworked the concept in terms of discursive social psychology, treating it in terms of the way that notions of place are discursively constructed and how relations between places and people are constituted through language. Applying this concept is a helpful way of examining issues relevant to refugees from a discursive psychological perspective.

Fleeing persecution and violence is seen as an essential aspect of being treated as a ‘genuine’ refugee. This means that comparisons between places based on their levels of danger or safety can function to treat people in these terms, such that people are considered in relation to their need to flee and be provided with asylum. For instance, Kirkwood et al. (2013a) illustrated that the extent to which people discuss countries in economic terms (i.e., European countries such as the UK as being wealthy and asylum seekers’ countries of origin as being poor) similarly positions people as being motivated by economic concerns. In this way, refugees are repositioned as ‘economic migrants’ given the logic of an argument that emphasises economic issues and assumes that people are motivated by these considerations. Conversely, framing the discussion in terms of danger and safety can work to construct asylum seekers’ countries of origin as dangerous places, whereas host

societies are presented as relatively safe, which positions asylum seekers in terms of their need to find safety and constitutes their identity as refugees (Kirkwood, Goodman, McVittie, & McKinlay, 2015).

Clearly, the extent to which a refugee's country of origin is presented as sufficiently dangerous as to justify fleeing is a core consideration in terms of their legitimacy as a refugee. Constructing a country as extremely dangerous works to construe someone from that country as a 'genuine refugee'. It is worth noting that the Convention definition of a refugee makes reference to a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted' (UNHCR, 2010), which contains both 'subjective' aspects – the 'fear' – and 'objective' aspects – this being 'well-founded'. Edwards (2005) refers to these as the 'subject side' and 'object side' of accounts. Both of these aspects are identifiable in refugees' accounts of their countries of origin. In terms of the 'object side' of such accounts, these may focus on details of extreme violence and death, particularly among those close to the refugee, such as family members, as a way to work up such accounts as 'real' and such dangers as potentially affecting the speaker (Kirkwood et al., 2015). Constructing countries of origin as places where killing is commonplace and death is inevitable works to constitute asylum seekers as needing to flee in order to survive, as being in need of protection, and as being justified in leaving their homes in search of safety. In terms of the 'subject side' of such accounts, these may make reference to what may happen to them if they return to their countries of origin as well as including displays of emotion, as shown in the following extract from an interview with an asylum seeker:

It was very very cold I feel so many difficulties because of all those experiences but I can't go back because I can go back and I would die. I can't go back because if I go back I would die I do not have a good life here ((crying)) as I struggle a lot
(Goodman, Burke, Liebling, & Zasada, 2015, p. 333)

This account draws on notions of place in a way that not only justifies the need for the speaker to leave their country of origin but also works to legitimise her reasons for being in the host country. More specifically, stating 'I can't go back because I can go back and I would die' emphasises the imminent danger related to the country of origin, thereby implying that fleeing was necessary. Moreover, stating 'I do not have a good life here' implicitly argues against the suggestion that she has come to the UK 'merely' to improve her life or for economic benefits. Crying during the interview reinforces the emotional dimensions of the account, providing a bodily demonstration of the suffering that she experiences, as well as potentially the real fear she feels in relation to the idea of returning home and perhaps the loss of this possibility (see Ladegaard, 2014). The way that places are presented – particularly refugees' countries of origin, but also potential host societies – are clearly tied up with refugees' identities, and both connect with the legitimacy of their need for asylum (Kirkwood et al., 2013a).

Constructing refugees as an economic threat to the host nation

It has been demonstrated that people construct themselves as refugees by working up descriptions of conflict, and that they seek refuge in other countries because they claim this move offers peace (e.g., Goodman et al., 2015). However, there are a number of ways in which refugees are presented as being threatening to host countries, including being economically threatening, culturally threatening and representing a risk of violence and further danger in the form of terrorism and criminality. All of these representations work together to construct refugees as either in potential, or real, conflict with host nations, which in turn all work as arguments against hosting refugees.

The suggestion that refugees represent an economic threat is one of the most commonly used arguments against supporting refugees and there are several ways that this economic threat is constructed. As mentioned above, the most common of these is to suggest that refugees aren't really refugees at all and that instead they are economic migrants. Van Dijk (1997) demonstrated how the term 'economic refugee' was first used in the 1980s to refer to Tamil refugees arriving in Europe. This term works to blur the distinction between refugees (this category would certainly apply to Tamils who were fleeing Sri Lanka's civil war) and those who are travelling for purely financial reasons (who would not be refugees).

Lynn and Lea (2003, p. 432) referred to a strategy of 'differentiating the other' in which refugees are split into either 'genuine' or 'bogus' asylum seekers where only 'genuine' ones are deemed worthy of support. They present an example of a letter written to the editor of the British *Daily Express* newspaper:

No-one begrudges genuine refugees a home, but when bogus ones are housed within weeks and UK citizens, black and white, are left to rot in hostels, it does seem unfair?
(Lynn & Lea, 2003, p. 433)

Central to this strategy of distinguishing 'genuine' from 'bogus ones' is the suggestion that there is no animosity towards 'real' refugees, and only towards those who are cheating. This means that speakers can protect themselves against potential accusations of being uncaring towards refugees. Instead, it is only those who are presented as cheats, and therefore who have no right to be in the host country, that are presented as problematic. These 'bogus' refugees are positioned as being a threat to the existing community because they are taking away valuable resources from needy people in the host nations (here those 'rotting' without a home) rather than because of any hatred or ill-will towards refugees. In Lynn and Lea's example, using a common strategy for defending against claims of racism (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001; Augoustinos, Tiffin, & Rapley, 1999; Kirkwood, Liu, & Weatherall, 2005), the writer refers explicitly to 'UK citizens, black and white' in an attempt to demonstrate that this is a general threat for the entire population and that this opposition is nothing to do with racial conflict (as it is equally problematic for black and white citizens). The nature of this conflict is therefore presented as an economic one about finite resources and as about fairness.

There are many further examples of refugees being presented as economic migrants rather than people seeking safety. Goodman and Speer (2007) developed van Dijk (1997) and Lynn and Lea's (2003) work on categories by showing that participants in debates about refugees topicalize and argue about which categories should be applied, with critics of supporting refugees claiming that refugees are really migrants while supporters of refugees claim that these opponents wrongly call refugees economic migrants. Goodman and Speer also demonstrated that speakers often mix up talk about economic migration and refugees so that the distinction between the two comes to be blurred. This means that on top of 'distinguishing the other' where refugees are split into two types, there is also a blurring of the other so that all refugees can come to be viewed as, at least potentially, economic migrants. This means that all refugees come to be presented as a potential threat to the host nation's economy.

The idea that refugees represent an economic threat was also prominent in the work of Goodman and Burke (2011) who showed that economic arguments were presented as a key reason for people to oppose asylum seekers. They present the following example, where there was a discussion of whether or not opposing asylum seeking constitutes racism:

if you just h- (0.4) oppose the who:l:e (0.6) asylum seeking system >s- in the (sense) that<
 (0.5) oh:: (.) they're living off us >in the sense that< it's all basic- (.) on (0.4) based around
 (0.8) the whole financial bit of it then I suppose that's not really being raci:st you're just
 saying y'know (.) they're living off us

(adapted from Goodman and Burke 2011, p. 114)

This explanation for opposing asylum seeking is presented as a legitimate reason for people to oppose asylum seeking, and this is especially favoured over racism as an explanation for opposing asylum seeking. This tells us two important things about refugees and conflict. First, it is accepted that there *is* a conflict between refugees and settled communities. This conflict takes the form of an economic one, where refugees are viewed as a potential financial drain on the established population. Second, it is also widely accepted by most that the conflict with refugees is nothing to do with racial conflict, but is an economic one. Central to this argument is the idea of an 'us and them distinction' (Goodman, 2005; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Mehan, 1997; Van Der Valk, 2003; van Dijk, 1997; Verkuyten, 2005) which is a well-documented strategy in the presentation of refugees. This works to present refugees as unlike, and different from, 'us', citizens of the host nation. This construction of difference, when coupled with the idea that an outside 'they' are living off 'us' frames the relationship between the two (constructed) groups as very much one of economic conflict: people will oppose 'them' because of the cost they will have on 'us'.

Constructing refugees as criminals and terrorists

It has therefore been demonstrated that refugees, who are regularly presented as falsely claiming to be refugees, are presented as in economic conflict with citizens of host nations. Their acceptance into host nations is therefore challenged because it represents a financial threat to settled communities. There are, however, other ways in which refugees are presented as threatening to host nations, in which they are presented as criminal and potential terrorists.

The suggestion that many refugees are in fact 'bogus', already implies that refugees may be of poor moral character and gives credibility to the category 'illegal immigrant', which is a term that some opponents of asylum seeking attempt to impose onto refugees (see Goodman and Speer, 2007 for examples of this). However, other representations of refugees go further by suggesting that they are likely to be criminals, and in some cases even terrorists.

Leudar et al. (2008, p. 198) show how crime and asylum seekers are often spoken about together to create what they describe as a 'salient category-bound activity applicable to both.' This means that the category of asylum seeker comes to contain an element of criminality. They provide two examples that support this, the first from the newspaper the *Daily Mail*:

Blunkett: Asylum seekers may be tagged
 Asylum seekers could be electronically tagged rather than locked up in detention centres, Home Secretary David Blunkett said. A new Asylum Bill will bring in powers which would largely be used to tag asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected.
 (adapted from Leudar et al., 2008, p. 198).

This first example is a report of the then UK Home Secretary announcing a new policy that failed asylum seekers should have electronic tags, rather than be detained. While the policy is presented as a relatively lenient one, it nevertheless suggests that asylum seekers may well be criminals and criminalises asylum seekers whose claims are not approved. In UK law, it is unusual to detain any innocent person (refugees are the exception, see Kirkwood et al., 2015 for more on detention), so references to detention already imply some level of criminality. This means that even the

downgraded reference to 'tags' (which are often associated with punishment for anti-social behaviour) still implies that these rejected asylum seekers are somehow criminal. Indeed, the whole notion of a 'failed' or 'rejected' asylum seeker supports the idea of the 'bogus' or 'illegal' asylum seeker, even though this may say more about the way asylum claims are decided. Leudar et al. (2008) show how this idea of criminality also permeates the talk of citizens of host countries as well as the media, as can be seen in this next example:

if they're true and they are really going to get persecuted in their own country (.) by all means yes (.) come here but if they're just here so they can get their their (.) they get this they get that money, housing, blah blah, send them back (2.0) er: when they do come (adapted from Leudar et al., 2008, p. 201)

This example contains a number of the anti-refugee arguments that have been presented so far, including that refugees are split into 'genuine' and 'bogus' types, who all present a potential economic threat to the host country. In addition to this is the suggestion that refugees have criminal characteristics, and so may be claiming asylum purely to defraud the country they are claiming in.

While the threat of crime is a serious one that can be used to justify the exclusion of refugees, the threat of terrorism is potentially even more serious and worrying for a host nation. Presenting refugees as constituting this type of threat can therefore work to effectively construct refugees as undesirable, thereby positioning them as problematic and dangerous. The following example, a *Mail Online* headline, shows how refugees come to be associated with a threat of terrorism:

Paris terrorist ringleader bragged he entered France among a group of 90 jihadis and claimed the migrant crisis had made it easy for them to travel freely across Europe (Goodman, Sirriyeh, & McMahon, 2017, p. 110)

This headline followed a major terrorist attack in Paris, which represents a serious point of conflict which is constructed here as being between Jihadis and Europeans (and Paris in particular, where many people were killed and injured in the attack). While this particular headline doesn't refer to refugees (or asylum seekers), the reference to 'migrant crisis' nevertheless makes refugees salient, as the 'crisis' (which as Goodman et al., 2017, demonstrate was called different things at different points) implies refugees (especially those fleeing the Syrian civil war). Therefore refugees (and migrants more generally) come to be associated with the on-going threat of terrorism to Europe. This is yet another way in which refugees come to be presented as in conflict with host nations and as a threat to their safety. When refugees are presented as a threat, this justifies attempts to prevent their right to asylum.

Constructing refugees as a threat to community cohesion

Refugees can also be presented as a threat to community cohesion within a host country, which means that opposing refugees can be viewed as being in the interests of cohesion, and therefore supportive of peace and to prevent conflict. Goodman (2008) showed how political figures argued over the extent to which harsh government policy on refugees protected social cohesion. The following example, which comes from a televised debate programme about asylum laws, contains an exchange between the (then) incumbent government minister, Beverly Hughes, the chair and Andrew Green, the head of an anti-immigration pressure group:

Hughes: I think we are radically transforming the system and generating public confidence in er in the asylum system .hhh it's a fundamental prerequisite for us its fundamental for community relations in this country [lines omitted]

Chair: Well Andrew Green I saw you waving there er er they're talking tough (.) are they getting tough enough?

Green: [lines omitted] I think there's a real risk (.) that people are going to feel that (.) er immigration and asylum is not under control (.) and this is what is undermining confidence in the system (.) and doing great damage I think to community relations (adapted from Goodman, 2008, pp. 113–114)

It can be seen how the government minister claimed that policy (described by the chair as 'talking tough') works to support community cohesion, and then that the policy is criticised by the opponent of asylum for failing cohesion. While there is clearly disagreement between Hughes and Green, they are both in agreement that community cohesion is a positive thing that should be protected, and that perceptions of the asylum system can have a negative impact on them. The outcome is that community cohesion, a lack of conflict, comes to be the stated aim of policy makers, and the suggestion that asylum seekers (or migrants) may damage this comes to be established as factual and goes unchallenged. This means that the positive benefits of community cohesion come to be placed above offering safety to refugees (see Mulvey, 2010).

Connected to the idea that community cohesion is a positive thing that can be damaged by asylum seekers, is the threat of far-right extremists gaining support. This argument can be seen in the following example from a BBC news report analysis on the (then) Conservative leader, Michael Howard's anti-asylum speech:

but if you look at the opinion polls (.) asylum and immigration is right up there now as one of the issues people are most concerned about (.) and if the Tories don't talk about it (.) there's a whole lot of people to their right (.) who will and are talking about it (.) so I think (.) they're (.) they may be concluding (.) that the bigger risk (.) er is not raising it (Goodman, 2008, pp. 117–118).

In this example, asylum is presented as a matter of concern for the public, so much so that failure for the UK's centre right Conservative party ('Tories') to deal with these concerns may allow the extreme right to garner support. This argument is therefore very similar to the one about community cohesion: if political parties do not address legitimate concerns about asylum seekers coming to the UK, then far right parties (who represent a threat to community cohesion) may come to power. These are circular arguments, because they suggest that mainstream parties need to act like extremist parties, to prevent extremists from coming to power and therefore protecting community cohesion. However, despite this, they nevertheless give credibility to harsh anti-asylum policies, which harm refugees, on the grounds of preventing conflict and maintaining peace.

Accounts of racism and violence towards refugees

Once asylum seekers and refugees reach a potential host society, this does not mean that they now find themselves to be safe. Unfortunately, experiences of racism, violence and abuse can occur even once refugees have found asylum (Kirkwood et al., 2013b; O'Nions, 2010; Spicer, 2008; Stewart & Mulvey, 2014). This challenges the notion that host societies do in fact constitute places of safety. So how are such issues accounted for? Members of the general public may talk about racism in ways that suggest: 1) that such negative views are generally limited to a minority of people; 2) that such views are due to ignorance; and 3) that if they only knew the truth about asylum seekers and refugees they would not hold such negative views (Kirkwood et al., 2015). This is illustrated in the following extract:

P5 [...] as I say you still have your minority (.) that em
 (1.5) don't agree wi' people being here
 SK mm-hmm
 P5 (0.8) but not even that, I think it's just that they're ignorant (.)
 SK right=
 P5 =and don't know the facts
 (Kirkwood et al., 2015, p. 123)

Suggesting that such views are only held by a minority of people works to discredit the views through implying that they are not widely held. It also works to protect against the suggestion that the host society is generally racist. Suggesting that the views are due to ignorance works to reduce the culpability of the people who hold such views. Stating that people would have more favourable views if they knew the truth suggests that positive change is possible while also working to legitimise the presence of refugees and asylum seekers (i.e., the true reasons are reasonable and would not provoke negative reactions if people only knew them). In this way, such accounts of racism manage the troubling existence of antagonism in the host society while working to portray it as a place where asylum seekers and refugees can belong.

As well as considering how local people talk about racism in the host society, it is important to consider how asylum seekers and refugees produce accounts of this antagonism, as shown in the following extract:

R10 asylum-seekers (1.2) mm (1.0) I know most of it's it's not- it's got nothing to do with
 your (0.8) colour or y-
 SK °oh okay°
 R10 mm
 SK °right°
 R10 it's just a minority those who just think that (1.6) you just coming in to get a job or
 things like that heh
 (Kirkwood et al., 2015, p. 131)

As shown in this extract, as with accounts from people who are not refugees, asylum seekers and refugees may also produce accounts that portray racism as due to ignorance. Moreover, racism may be presented in a way that minimises its nature and extent, and reduces the culpability of those who display it. For instance, accounts of verbal abuse and physical violence may present these as unintentional, as not directly targeted at the asylum seekers and refugees themselves, or as not being racially motivated. This is shown in the above extract, as the speaker states 'it's got nothing to do with your (0.8) colour', where the racist motivation is directly negated. Moreover, those who express the antagonism are portrayed as a 'minority' and under a potentially mistaken apprehension: 'those who just think that (1.6) you just coming in to get a job'.

As shown by Kirkwood et al. (2013b), where the potentially racially motivated aspects of violence are referred to, the account can be presented in a way that refers to the racist aspects only indirectly ('my skin'), presents it in a tentative way ('maybe'), embeds it in a narrative that portrays the racist explanation as a 'last resort', and overall presents the speaker as reluctant to interpret the violence as racially motivated:

R9 yeah certainly so and I say I did nothing to nobody [as far as I know
 INT [mmm yeah
 R9 you know and I will say maybe (.) this thing is is my skin (1.0) yeah and I hate to

say that
(Kirkwood et al., 2013b, p. 756)

Providing accounts in this way works to minimise the interpretation of the host society as being a racist place and also works to emphasise the potential for asylum seekers and refugees to belong. It also sensitively manages the 'taboo' on making accusations of racism (Goodman & Burke, 2010), in this case about a society that has provided protection from persecution, albeit not providing an environment that was free from harm. However, it also raises questions about how racism is to be identified and addressed, as both general members of the public and asylum seekers and refugees may talk about racism in ways that make it seem to disappear.

Justifying and criticising harsh responses to asylum seekers

Some responses to asylum seekers are very harsh, particularly detention, destitution and forced return. The use of such measures risks portraying the host society as uncaring towards refugees and undermining the values of protection. For this reason, justification for these responses depends on presenting them as reasonable and portraying asylum seekers as people who are deserving of such responses. At one level, this can be done through distinguishing between 'genuine refugees' and others who neither need nor deserve asylum; this avoids the portrayal of treating 'refugees' harshly. Going further, as illustrated above, those who are on the receiving end of such processes can be portrayed as 'criminals' and as presenting a danger to the host society, which justifies the use of such practices in order to 'protect' the host society, while depoliticising the response (Malloch & Stanley, 2005). That is, by being 'illegal' these people are deemed deserving of any harsh punishment they receive.

Equally, these responses can be challenged or resisted, particularly through construing these responses as immoral by the host society's standards or as inappropriate given refugees' nature. For instance, Lynn and Lea (2003) demonstrated that detention centres could be portrayed in ways that emphasised their harsh nature and thereby troubled their existence in the host society, as shown in the following extract from a letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail*:

While awaiting classification by the authorities, suspicious foreigners are to be 'concentrated' into 'reception centres', many of them isolated camps with high-security perimeter fences. For now we are told that this is for their own protection – but barbed wire works both ways, and what might happen in these camps under an even more Right-wing government?

(Lynn & Lea, 2003, p. 442)

In this extract, references to 'isolated camps', 'high-security perimeter fences' and 'barbed wire' works to present the 'reception centres' in ways that emphasise their harsh nature. Moreover, reference to 'concentrated' and 'camps' and 'even more Right-wing government' make implicit connections with Nazi concentration camps (Lynn & Lea, 2003), further reinforcing the severity of this response to asylum seekers and presenting it as morally questionable. Relatedly, Lynn and Lea (2003, p. 442) presented materials in which asylum seekers were portrayed as 'children, pregnant women, the elderly, the ill and survivors of torture'. In this way, asylum seekers were constituted as those who are innocent, vulnerable or otherwise in need of care. Similarly, Bates and Kirkwood (2013) showed how local activists who worked to stop dawn raids on asylum seekers in Scotland presented their accounts in ways that emphasised the harshness of the raids and the innocence of the asylum seekers. This included describing the dawn raids as involving 'armoured gear', 'helmets',

'handcuffs' and 'cages' whereas the asylum seekers were referred to as 'families' and 'little boys' in 'pyjamas' (Bates & Kirkwood, 2013, p. 25). Likewise, Kirkwood et al. (2015, p. 168) illustrated how practitioners who support asylum seekers could present detention centres as 'prison' and asylum seekers as 'families', 'children' and 'babies'. Overall, this works to present the response to asylum seekers as incompatible with their nature, in the sense that asylum seekers are construed as those who are innocent or vulnerable, whereas the responses are portrayed in ways that emphasise their harsh nature. In this way, such accounts do moral work (Drew, 1998), criticising the use of detention and other punitive responses through highlighting their immoral nature. By humanising refugees and asylum seekers, such accounts work to challenge and resist existing policies towards refugees, particularly those that are likely to have negative effects on those subject to them (Kirkwood, 2017).

A present-day example: Peace, conflict and the European refugee 'crisis'

As the examples above demonstrate, issues around refugees have been topical throughout the 21st century. However, since the start of the 'refugee/migrant crisis' in April 2015 it has become more topical than ever, dominating much of the news in the UK and Europe in the summer of 2015 and beyond. The 'crisis' itself was partly the result of the civil war in Syria and the destabilisation of Libya, so the causes of this event are deeply rooted in conflict, where people affected by the conflicts searched for peace and safety. Goodman et al. (2017) demonstrated how the naming of this 'crisis' in UK media fluctuated over time. It began as a 'Mediterranean Migrant crisis', which presented the problem as far away, and notably one involving migrants, rather than refugees. Next it became a 'Calais Migrant crisis', which suggested more of a threat to the UK. At this point, threatening imagery of 'migrants' was used which implied a risk of conflict. A major event that occurred during the 'crisis' was the publication of photographs of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, who died attempting to reach the safety of Europe. This event had a great impact on the representation of the 'crisis', resulting in the renaming of the 'crisis' from a 'migrant crisis' to a 'refugee crisis' in different countries (Goodman et al., 2017; Parker et al., in press). This change, however, was short lived, as the 'crisis' came to be associated with terrorism, and soon reverted back to a 'migrant crisis'. The 'crisis' was always presented as one for Europe (or the UK) and never for the refugees themselves (Goodman et al., 2017).

Throughout the 'crisis' many of the previously established findings on the representations of refugees could be seen, alongside other representations that were new. First, the threat posed to host nations by refugees remained, so that opposition to supporting refugees continued. The following is an example of how the 'European migrant crisis' was presented by the BBC in August 2015:

Thousands of migrants have died and many thousands more have been rescued after setting sail from Libya recently. Wednesday's rescue operation was one of 10 such missions currently taking place in the waters off Libya, the Italian coastguard said. ... Ahead of the summit, Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz told the BBC that current EU asylum regulations were not working. Earlier in the week, Macedonian police had to use stun grenades after thousands of migrants broke through police lines at the Greek border. (Parker, Naper, & Goodman, in press)

From this example, it is clear that while refugees (referred to here as migrants, which works to delegitimise them) are in serious danger and are risking their lives, they nevertheless present a security concern for Europeans because they are being controlled with force in a situation that is presented as a violent conflict (indeed war analogies have been shown to present refugees negatively; Van Der Valk, 2003). Goodman et al., (2017, p. 108) also show how talk of conflict and

violence can be used to describe the 'crisis', with an example from Channel 4 news: "Plans to force European Union member states to receive a "fair" share of refugees seeking asylum in Europe are to be fought by the UK, in favour of deploying gunships to tackle trafficking gangs".

During the brief period when the 'crisis' was referred to as a 'refugee crisis' there were generally more positive representation of refugees, who were humanised and more widely viewed as legitimate. This period coincided with an outpouring of public support for refugees. Kirkwood (2017) showed how the phrase 'human beings' was used by members of the UK parliaments to refer to refugees. This term works to remove the potential conflict between refugees and host communities and provides a more peaceful construction, where the 'us and them' distinction, so commonly used in anti-refugee talk, can be minimised, therefore constructing a superordinate category.

Nevertheless, there remained ways to challenge, and delegitimise refugees. As the 'crisis', and the reporting of Alan Kurdi's death demonstrated, the people affected by the 'crisis' were refugees fleeing conflict in search of safety. This meant that the common strategy of presenting refugees as illegitimate (i.e. economic migrants or 'bogus asylum seekers') was less readily available (although for some, including the UKIP leader Nigel Farage, this idea persisted; Nightingale & Goodman, 2016). Nevertheless, there was still scope to challenge the legitimacy of refugees when the UK government decided to allow a limited number of child refugees into the UK. Goodman and Narang's (under review) analysis of a discussion forum about this policy demonstrated that refugee children were presented as adults posing as children, and these adults were deemed to threaten peace in the UK, as can be seen in the following example:

That poor young woman who was murdered in Sweden in January was working in a 'child migrant centre'. Her killer claimed to be 15 but has been deemed by the courts to be 'at least 18'. Her family say many of the 'children' are in their 20s.
(Goodman & Narang, under review)

This comment, like many others, works to challenge the claim that child refugees are really children and also presents these refugees as particularly dangerous and threatening. The debate about child refugees briefly became a major news story itself in 2016, when the tabloids ran headlines claiming that adults were getting into the UK posing as children, which demonstrates that even when it is clear that refugees are fleeing conflict, and even when debates turn to supporting children, who were shown to be vulnerable in the 'crisis', they can still be presented as a threat to the host nation, but in this case by shifting categorical boundaries from children to adults.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the important contribution that Discursive Psychology has made to understanding arguments about asylum seekers and refugees as relevant to Peace Psychology. It has been shown that Discursive Psychology allows for a detailed understanding of the ways in which refugees' countries of origin are debated so as to be either presented by refugees and their supporters as places of danger and war, or as places of safety but poverty by those arguing against them. Such constructions of place determine the identity of refugees, so they come to be seen as legitimate only when their countries of origin are accepted as places of conflict. Discursive Psychology also illustrates how arguments over whether or not refugees should be accepted are grounded in the idea that refugees are a potential threat, in conflict with settled communities. This threat is presented as coming in the form of economic conflict, where refugees are presented as taking away resources from those already in the country. Refugees can be presented as even more threatening, in the form of being potential criminals or terrorists, and as constituting a threat to community cohesion, and therefore peace itself. What this means is that arguments about peace,

conflict, threats and safety are central to debates about whether or not refugees should be allowed access to host countries. Arguments that are based on the idea of protecting peace, can therefore be used to prevent people fleeing conflicts from accessing peace. Put simply, peace is used as an argument to prevent victims of wars from finding peace. By better understanding these arguments, discursive psychology offers the important potential to challenge these strategies for denying people peace.

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